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INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1513

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 3695

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1380

RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1949

RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2462

RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

RUETIAA/NSA FORT MEADE MD

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

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SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, EUR/ACE, DRL
AID/W FOR EE/EA

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: PARLIAMENT REQUESTS INPUT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT LAW

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: Representatives from USAID's local governance implementing partners met with the Parliament and the Institute of Democracy and Human Rights on April 23-24 to discuss potential areas for cooperation. In a significant breakthrough for cooperation with the Mejlis, the head of the Committee on Intergovernmental and Interparliamentary Affairs requested USAID's commentary on the existing law on local governance. The director of the Institute indicated its willingness to organize joint activities related to reviewing legislation in this area once a new Constitution is approved, and specifically requested support for improving the functions of the Citizens' Appeal Commission. Noting the growing number of USAID partners that have either proposed or already established joint activities with the Institute, the director suggested that USAID consider developing a framework cooperation agreement similar to the United Nations' Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). END SUMMARY.

MEJLIS FINALLY ACCEPTS AN OFFER

¶3. (U) On April 23, visiting experts from USAID's Community Empowerment project and USAID Country Representative met with the parliamentary committee heads responsible for Local Government and Intergovernmental and Inter-parliamentary Affairs. A representative from Urban Institute described its USAID-funded work in support of local government reform in countries ranging from Eastern Europe to Central Asia. Counterpart International's Azerbaijan Country Director described its ongoing work with Urban Institute that focused on municipal development issues in cooperation with Azerbaijan's parliament and local government structures.

¶4. (U) Parliament representatives were interested in the experience of other countries, and asked numerous questions about how finances were allocated from the center to the local levels. Stopping short of accepting opportunities for training local officials on a range of financial and managerial issues, the deputies nonetheless

acknowledged its importance and the critical need for such activities. Noting that the role of parliament was to develop or improve legislation, the committee chairman on Intergovernmental and Interparliamentary Affairs requested that Urban Institute review existing legislation for conformity with international standards. Closing by saying "Let's start our cooperation this way," he agreed to submit copies of the law(s) for review to USAID through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

INSTITUTE WANTS SUPPORT WITH APPEALS' COMMISSION

¶5. (U) On April 24, the same delegation met with the director of the Institute of Democracy and Human Rights, Shirin Ahmedova, to discuss potential areas of cooperation. After listening to the experts' remarks, Ahmedova identified three areas for possible joint activities. First, without duplicating the role of Parliament, USAID could organize a seminar with international experts examining the role of local government officials, similar to an event recently undertaken by USAID-partner the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL). Ahmedova noted that this should not include the Constitution, since a draft Constitution must be submitted by July in response to President Berdimuhamedov's recent announcement regarding updates to the existing Constitution. According to Ahmedova, it was not possible for Counterpart or Urban Institute to work in this area due to the time necessary for approvals, and the fact that reviewing local governance legislation will take time.

¶6. (U) Next, Ahmedova asked for assistance in streamlining the work of the Citizens' Appeal Commission. If local government structures worked well and problems were resolved on the local level, most complaints would never rise to the level of the commission. To this end, she suggested the training of local officials with the goal of increasing the effectiveness of their work.

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¶7. (U) Saying "it's not a big problem," Ahmedova also suggested that support in developing instructions and regulations for local officials would be useful in ensuring their understanding of responsibilities under local and national-level laws. Indirectly acknowledging a much greater problem, she said that there was an urgent need to ensure correspondence between national and local laws. This, however, was a long-term issue for which the head of government was responsible. Still, the Institute was prepared help arrange training seminars for local officials in this area.

¶8. (U) Finally, in response to the increasing opportunities for USAID's partners to cooperate with the Institute, Ahmedova proposed that USAID consider developing a framework plan for cooperation similar to the UN's Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). She suggested that such an approach would help identify a range of partners for USAID's programs and activities in this sector. After developing this framework, it should be submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for approval.

¶9. (SBU) COMMENT: The request by parliament for commentary represents a breakthrough in USAID's engagement with this institution. Past meetings had never progressed beyond a general request for more information on USAID's programs and their results. The request could be a recognition of the potential value of the proposed assistance -- or possibly the result of intergovernmental competition with more assertive structures like the Institute. Regardless, USAID will await the official versions of the laws and will supply the requested commentary. After that, we will see if any doors to further cooperation open wider.

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: As in past meetings, the Institute continues to request assistance related to the Citizens' Appeals Commission. From the director's reference to a growing number of complaints, it appears that citizens continue to use this mechanism as a way to connect with the government, and possibly that actions meriting complaint are on the rise. Displaying an appreciation for the skills necessary for appropriate functioning of local government, Ahmedova rightfully acknowledged that local officials need more training in order to be able to properly do their jobs.

¶11. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: Regarding the development of an UNDAF-type framework, the USG and the Government of Turkmenistan are already in discussions about developing a new Cooperation Agreement that covers USG assistance programs. Ms. Ahmedova is probably not aware of these ongoing efforts, and the suggestion did not appear to be an effort to bureaucratize USAID's growing relationship with the Institute. Regardless, her request highlights the importance of developing more formal relations with government structures as a result increased the bilateral engagement. END COMMENT.

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